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ABSTRACT

The Fairfax County Public schools (VA) presents Familygram, a newsletter directed to parents to help them better discuss and use test results for the improvement of their child's education and the quality of the education program in Fairfax County. An attempt is made to answer several important questions: What tests are given? Which of them are required? and What can they measure? What can't they measure? Also discussed are how tests can be used to improve instruction and how to accurately understand the test scores. A schedule of tests required either by the Virginia Department of Education or the Fairfax County School Board is presented. An included glossary defines norms, percentiles, percentile bands, educational ability tests, and achievement tests. (PN)

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FAMILYGRAM

Published
for Citizens of
Fairfax County

Special Edition
on TESTING

Linton Deck, Division Superintendent

10700 Page Avenue • Fairfax, Virginia 22030

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Dear Parents:

Testing can be a positive element in improving the instruction and learning of the student in your family. Both we in the schools and you as parents need to understand how tests are used, and what they measure.

In this FAMILYGRAM, we try to answer several important questions: What tests are given? Which of them are required? What can they measure? What can't they measure? Too often, we educators resort to the mystical and highly technical jargon about testing, leaving parents with the feeling that testing is something they can never understand!

In my view, what tests do best is assist teachers in diagnosing learning needs. Tests are also one way—though not necessarily the most important one—of measuring student achievement. Testing can provide useful information, but it can supply only part of the information that is needed to make sound educational decisions. Teachers, administrators, and parents need also to look at quality of homework, written work, participation in class discussions, teacher-assigned grades, and the student's application of what has been learned.

Different types of tests given in FCPS provide different kinds of information. Some tests can help teachers determine how your child is doing in school; others assess instructional programs; and still others provide assistance in helping all of us know how well our schools are doing in relation to a variety of national standards.

Many of the tests are mandated either by the Virginia Department of Education or by Fairfax County. Others are given for the purpose of gaining additional clues to help individual students by providing more diagnostic information for teachers. I am concerned about the amount of testing that occurs, and I have directed the FCPS staff to ensure that the tests we give serve only the purpose of improving the instruction and learning of students.

As you know, Fairfax County students generally score well above national averages on tests. However, it is very important that these results, as well as those for other tests, are interpreted correctly and used appropriately by educators, students, parents, and other citizens, with an understanding of their purposes and their limitations. Tests have severe limitations, and often parents and educators have ascribed more importance to test results than they really deserve.

It is my hope that, after you have read this FAMILYGRAM, you will be in a better position to discuss and use test results for the improvement of your child's education, and, in cooperation with the schools, to continually improve the quality of the entire education program in Fairfax County.

Sincerely,

Linton Deck
Division Superintendent

SPRING 1982



sample usually several thousand students. Results of this norm group's testing are analyzed and ranked. Later, when your child takes the test, his or her scores can be compared to the results of this norm group by using scores such as percentiles, stanines, and grade equivalents. These are merely different ways of comparing how well an individual performs on the test compared to the norm group. These scores are described in more detail on page 6.

What are criterion-referenced tests and how are they different from norm-referenced tests?

The main difference is that a criterion-referenced test, such as a Program of Studies test, gives specific information about what a student has or has not learned about specified skills or objectives. It does not compare one student's performance to that of a norm group. A norm-referenced test can tell you how your child compares to the norm group in math or reading. But a criterion-referenced test can tell you more specifically whether he or she can, for example, use zeros correctly in multiplication or can identify the main idea in a story.

TESTS CAN BE USED TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION

The tests students are most often given are achievement tests made by their teachers. These teacher-made tests are part of the regular classroom programs. They provide one way of looking at your child's progress in school.

Norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests are the two other types of achievement tests that are used. These tests provide additional information that can help to guide instruction. These two types of tests have different designs and purposes.

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What are norm-referenced tests? What can they tell about a student that other tests cannot?

Norm-referenced tests (sometimes called standardized tests) are designed to compare what your children have learned about a subject like reading or math with what other students have learned about those same subjects. Norm-referenced tests, such as the SRA, usually cover material taught in most schools in subjects like reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies. They do not necessarily test precisely what your child is learning in his or her Fairfax County classroom.

Norm-referenced tests derive this name because they compare an individual's performance with that of a group called a norm group. The norm group is comprised of students from all kinds of schools from all parts of the country. Once a norm-referenced test is developed, it is given to this large national

How are the three different types of tests used?

CLASSROOM (TEACHER-MADE) TESTS help teachers find out how much students are learning about what is being taught in the class. They let teachers know whether or not students are ready to move on to the next unit or level of the subject. Along with other information, classroom tests are often used to help the teacher determine a youngster's grades in school.

CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS help teachers make decisions about what skills within a subject a student still needs to learn. Teachers use information obtained from criterion-referenced tests to plan students' individual learning programs. Using these tests during the school year helps teachers to see how well the learning program is working and how it can be improved.

NORM-REFERENCED TESTS provide a school or the school district with a standard, or yardstick, to measure the success of its curriculum and programs. They also help teachers by providing one indication of individual student achievement.

Are my child's test scores available to me?

Yes. Some score reports are sent home with your child. Others might be seen in a parent-teacher conference. Occasionally a score report may be sent through the mail.

SRA Tests

In FCPS, the most widely used norm-referenced tests are the "SRA tests," so-called because they were developed by Science Research Associates Inc. These tests are selected by the Virginia Department of Education, and they are required for students in grades 4, 8, and 11. In Fairfax County, students in grade 6 also take the SRA tests.

Will the same SRA tests that were used last year be used this year?

No. Recently the Virginia State Department of Education selected the 1978 edition of the SRA tests to replace the 1971 edition. It directed that the tests be given in the spring, rather than in the fall as had been done in the past. In March of this year the 1978 edition of the SRA tests will be administered for the first time in the Fairfax County Public Schools. These new tests measure essentially the same skills, but have been completely rewritten by SRA; different questions are asked. These "new" 1978 tests involved a new norm population of students. Since scores will be related to this new norm population, results will not be directly comparable with those from the "old" 1971 edition.

What are the SRA tests like? What do they measure?

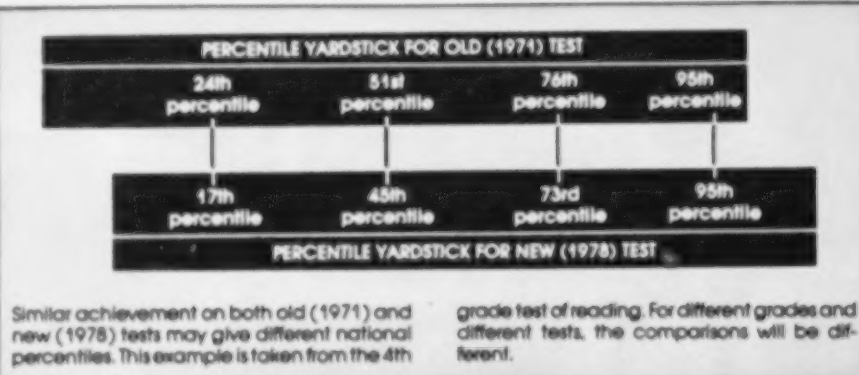
The SRA tests are printed in test booklets. Students mark their answers on separate answer sheets. Students complete the tests in approximately five hours, over several days. The questions on the test are multiple-choice items, ranging from easy to difficult, which can be answered and scored more quickly than can essay-type tests. The test measures what your child learns both in and out of school and provides measures both of educational ability and of educational achievement. The subjects which are tested in the achievement sections are reading, mathematics, language arts, social studies, science, and use of reference materials.

What do the SRA test results look like?

The SRA results are reports of scores as they relate to scores from a national norm group. Results are reported in scores such as percentiles, growth scale values, grade equivalents and stanines, and are discussed in more detail on page 6.

Is it likely that my child's SRA results will be much different from those of students my child's age who took the SRA last year?

Your child's results may be somewhat different this year. The SRA tests used in FCPS for the past nine years were administered to a large nationwide sample in 1971. This was the norming group. Since that time, performance of Fairfax students on these tests has been compared to that 1971 standard. The new SRA tests were normed in 1978, again using a large, but different nationwide sample of students. When the new SRA tests are scored, Fairfax students will be compared with the new 1978 national group. Where your youngster stands in relation to this new group may be quite different than this same child's standing would have been in relation to the old 1971 group. We are using a new standard, or yardstick, and where our students stand in relation to this national yardstick may be different than in the past.



Using an example unrelated to testing, one way of looking at changing standards is by thinking about how standards may shift in another situation, such as the following experience of Don Schollander, Olympic swimming champion and world record-holder. In the 1964 Olympics, Schollander won the Gold Medal for swimming the 100 meter free style event in 53.4. If he had swum the same event in the next Olympiad in 1968, his time would not have qualified him for any medal, because even the swimmer who won the third place Bronze Medal recorded a faster time than Schollander did four years earlier. Indeed, the standard, or yardstick, changed, because the 1968 swimmers were much faster than the 1964 swimmers. In the testing situation, the performance of the national norm group for some grades taking the SRA

test, like the performances of Olympic swimmers, has improved. Performance of other grades has declined.

Will Fairfax County's test results from the SRA (1978 "new" edition) be different from the results of the 1971 "old" edition?

It is very likely that they may be. Based on information from SRA, the Virginia State Department of Education says... "we have a fairly good idea of how the national percentiles will change from the 'old' to 'new' SRA tests. Based on the national equatings of the two tests, we expect the percentile rankings at the 4th grade level to be lower, 8th grade percentiles to be about the same, and 11th grade percentiles to be higher. These changes are attributable to differences in the performances of the national norm group samples."

In summary, reasons scores from the 1978 SRA test edition might vary from the scores of the 1971 SRA test edition include these:

- The 1978 edition represents an entirely new set of tests
- The norm information for the 1978 edition represents different samples of students from different sets of schools than those used in the 1971 edition
- Average achievement levels across the nation may have increased or decreased between 1971 and 1978

Actually, score changes resulting from use of different test editions might be compared to gas mileage differences between older and newer cars. In the past, 18 miles to the gallon was about average for a middle-sized car. With recent automobile changes, this 18 MPG is considerably less than average; in fact, many people expect to get twice that. The "new" SRA tests, like the automobiles, have changed. Comparisons of scores from the two test editions could be very confusing and misleading.

How important are the SRA test scores in making decisions about my child?

SRA test scores are only one measure of a student's performance in the areas tested. These scores cannot provide a complete picture of all the abilities and accomplishments of your child. Decisions made about your child are based on all available information. Test scores provide just one piece of this information.

POS Tests

It is very likely that your child has taken Program of Studies (POS) tests, often referred to as the "POS tests." These are a series of criterion-referenced tests developed by Fairfax County Public Schools teachers, curriculum specialists, and testing personnel, to measure selected objectives from the Fairfax County curriculum, Program of Studies. They are currently available for objectives in math (grades 3-8) and reading (grades 2-7). Development of POS tests began at the elementary school level in order to meet a state requirement of giving, at least annually, criterion-referenced tests in reading and math to students in grades 1-6. In most grades the POS tests are used instead of the Virginia State Basic Learning Skills Tests. (See schedule on p. 5.) Although the POS tests may be given to high school students, they are written to the elementary and intermediate school curriculum.

What is the Fairfax County Program of Studies (POS)?

The Program of Studies consists of handbooks which describe the basic curriculum in all subject areas of the FCPS instructional program. The goals and objectives that are outlined for each grade level or subject area were developed cooperatively by teachers, curriculum specialists, principals and other administrators. Curriculum objectives have been placed at the grade level at which most students achieve them. These handbooks are available at each school and in public libraries for reference.

J08F 73,12, 11/1/81

FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

PROGRAM OF STUDIES TEST SCORE REPORT
INDIVIDUAL SKILLS PROFILE

TEST NAME:	NAME:	GRADE
MATHEMATICS, LEVEL 3, FORM A	STUDENT NO:	
TEST DATE: 11/81	CLASS:	
	SCHOOL:	

THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT IS TO PROVIDE TEST RESULTS TO STUDENTS AND PARENTS.

ACCORDING TO YOUR TEST SCORES,

YOU ARE ABLE TO

- FIND THE DIFFERENCE, THRU 4 DIGIT MINUENDS AND 3 DIGIT SUBTRAHENDS, WITH OR WITHOUT REGROUPING. (SUBTEST 1)
- USE CALENDARS; WRITE THE DATE USING NUMERALS; SOLVE WORD PROBLEMS USING A CLOCK. (SUBTEST 6)
- DEFINE PERIODS OF TIME. (SUBTEST 13)
- TELL TIME TO THE NEAREST MINUTE; STATE MINUTES BEFORE/AFTER THE HOUR; USE AM/PM TO DESCRIBE PARTS OF THE DAY. (SUBTEST 14)

YOU MAY NEED HELP TO

- DETERMINE THE SUM OF FOUR ADDENDS THROUGH FOUR DIGITS, WHEN REGROUPING IS REQUIRED. (SUBTEST 3)
- SOLVE ONE-STEP WORD PROBLEMS FOR SUMS THRU 1000, AND SOLVE ONE-STEP AND TWO-STEP ADDITION AND SUBTRACTION WORD PROBLEMS. (SUBTEST 6)
- INTERPRET INFORMATION ON BAR AND LINE GRAPHS. (SUBTEST 12)

YOU NEED TO LEARN TO

- FIND THE MISSING TERM IN ADDITION, SUBTRACTION, MULTIPLICATION AND DIVISION STATEMENTS. (SUBTEST 3)
- MULTIPLY TO GET PRODUCTS THROUGH 81; MULTIPLY VERTICAL 2 DIGIT FACTORS BY 1 DIGIT FACTORS WITH REGROUPING. (SUBTEST 4)
- DIVIDE DIVIDENDS OF 81 OR LESS AND REMAINDER IS 0; DIVIDE 2 DIGIT NUMBERS ENDING IN 0, BY ONE DIGIT NUMBER, REMAINDER IS 0. (SUBTEST 5)
- SEQUENCE 4 DIGIT NUMBERS; IDENTIFY PLACE VALUE FOR NUMBERS THRU 4 DIGITS, WRITE 1/3, 1/4, 1/5, 1/8, FOR SHARED AREA; (SUBTEST 7)
- ADD COINS AND BILLS THROUGH \$14.00, BUY AND MAKE CHANGE THRU \$5.00; SOLVE ONE AND TWO-STEP (+, -) WORD PROBLEMS THRU \$99. (SUBTEST)
- FIND PERIMETERS OF POLYGONS, NO MORE THAN 4 SIDES; STATE METRIC & ENGLISH LENGTHS & WEIGHTS, READ CANT & FAHRENHEIT THERMOMETER. (SUBTEST 10)
- NAME THE PLANES ON A GEOMETRIC FIGURE (SUBTEST 11)
- IDENTIFY, DESCRIBE, AND DRAW LINE, RAY, AND ANGLE (SUBTEST 12)
- NAME THE TWO TYPES OF TRIANGLES AND TWO TYPES OF QUADRILATERALS. (SUBTEST 13)

What are the POS tests? What do they measure?

The POS tests are instructional tools for teachers and are best used to plan for ongoing instruction in a specific classroom for a specific child.

The POS tests are booklets containing a variety of small tests, each having questions on selected objective from the POS. They are in multiple choice format. Results from such a test show whether or not your child has learned specific skills listed in the FCPS curriculum. The tests attempt to give teachers information about the most important basic skills a student must learn.

Some basic skills are best "tested" through the teacher's observations of a child's daily classroom participation. Examples of the important skills a child will need but which are difficult to test in a multiple-choice format are: whether or not a child can write clearly; sound out difficult words; and assume responsibility. Additional important information which teachers need in order to instruct a child effectively in math and reading is attitude toward and ability in a subject. POS tests do not measure these.

**What do POS tests tell about my child?
Will I see the results?**

The POS tests tell teachers and others in schools about the instructional needs of individual students. For specific skills the tests identify:

- What your child is able to do
- What your child may need help to do
- What your child needs to learn to do

If your child's POS test is scored at the school, your child's teacher reports the results to you. If the POS test is scored by the FCPS Office of Research and Evaluation, your school will receive a computer-printed score report. This report may be sent home or discussed at a parent conference. A sample report is shown above.

HELP YOURSELF (cont. from p. 5)

BY FINDING MORE INFORMATION

● A good free publication is "Your Child and Testing," by Enid B. Herndon, published by the National Institute of Education. It is available from Consumer Information Center, Dept. 520J, Pueblo, Colorado, 81009.

● Your questions on tests can be answered by your child's teachers and counselors, and the school principals. They may refer you to the area office, or to the Office of Research and Evaluation (960-6000), the office of FCPS' Department of Planning and Development Services which prepared this issue of FAMILY-GRAM.

GLOSSARY

NORMS—Numerical scores that summarize how the pupils in the norming sample did on the test. Several types of the scores, or norms, are explained on the chart of scores found below. When the term "norm" is used, this generally means the average score obtained by the norm group.

PERCENTILES—Scores which tell where a student's test performance places him or her in relation to the students in the norm group. Percentiles range from 1 to 99 and tell you what percent of the norm group the student did better than. They have nothing to do with the percent of the questions a student answers correctly. Example: A percentile score of 70 does not mean the pupil answered 70 percent of the questions correctly. Instead, it means that the student's score was as good as, or better than, 70 percent of the students in the norm sample. This also means that the other 30 percent did better than this student.

PERCENTILE BANDS—Expressed as a range of scores; if a student took the same test several times, his or her score would fall within this range (band).

EDUCATIONAL ABILITY TESTS—A measure of a student's ability to do school work. Generally, these tests do not measure subjects taught in school. Instead, they measure a wide range of skills associated with verbal, numerical, and reasoning abilities. These skills are considered to be important for success in school. Scores on these tests are influenced by many factors (family, experiences, culture, previous success in school, etc.).

ACHIEVEMENT TESTS—A measure of how much a pupil has already learned about school subjects, like math, reading, or science.

UNDERSTANDING THE SCORES

Test scores should be thought of as an indication, never as an absolute measure, of your child's achievement. To get the most accurate picture, test scores should always be used with other information about your child. Following is a list of commonly available test scores and some samples of questions which can and cannot be answered by each type of score.

QUESTIONS WHICH CAN AND CANNOT BE ANSWERED USING VARIOUS TYPES OF SCORES

Type and Description of Score	Questions Which Can Be Answered With Various Scores	Questions Which Cannot Be Answered With Various Scores
MASTERY On a criterion-referenced test, a "score" of mastery indicates which of the skills tested a student has learned (mastery). A "score" of non-mastery indicates which of the skills tested a student still needs to work on.	● Can Ted use zeros correctly in multiplication? ● Can Judy read a story and identify the main idea?	● Is Susan ready for the next grade? ● How does Carl's reading performance compare with other students his age? =
GRADE EQUIVALENT (GE) A GE score of 8.2 for a 6th grader is an estimate indicating that he or she did as well as would the average student in the 2nd-month of the 8th grade—if the 8th grader had taken the same 6th grade test. It does not mean the student is ready for the 8th grade.	● How does Dave's performance compare with the performance of the national sample at his grade? ● According to what this test measures, is my child reading at grade level?	● Does Mary's grade equivalent score of 6.3 mean that she should be placed in grade 6? ● Doesn't Kai's score of 7.2 mean that he should be doing 7th grade work?
PERCENTILE The percentile describes where a student's performance stands in relation to the norm group. This means that a student who scored at the 98th percentile did better than 98 percent of the norm group.	● Is Jason's achievement above or below the norm? ● How does Helen's performance compare with third graders across the country?	● What percent of the total number of questions did Lewis answer correctly? ● Is "School X" doing twice as well as our school?
GROWTH SCALE VALUES (GSV) These are scores which can be used to trace student growth from year to year and to predict expected achievement within each subject area.	● Is Linda doing better this year than we would have expected based on her previous GSVs?	● Does my child need a tutor? ● Does Byron's achievement match his ability?
STANINE A score on a 9 point scale where the average score is 5, and the highest is 9. Like percentiles, these scores compare a student's performance to that of the norm group.	● Are there differences in Cheryl's achievement in different subject areas?	● Is Betsy's class learning faster than Janet's class? ● Does Kevin know the most important skills?

*CRT: Criterion-referenced tests/NRT: Norm-referenced tests

Are POS tests normed to Fairfax County students at my child's grade level?

No, they are not normed. The POS tests are criterion-referenced tests. They provide information for the instruction of individual students and not for comparison among students. The POS tests tell how your child is performing on selected skills. The tests do not provide information on how well your child is performing in relation to other students at his or her grade level.

Will my child receive an overall numerical score after taking a POS test?

No. Performance is described in terms of mastery or non-mastery of selected POS skills. There are no percentiles, norms, numerical totals, or other scores such as you might find with a norm-referenced test like the SRA. The reason is that your child's POS test results are criterion-referenced; the tests are not designed to make comparisons between students or groups of students. The POS tests are instructional tools for teachers and are best used to plan for ongoing instruction in a specific classroom for specific children.

If my child takes a POS test which is higher or lower than my child's grade level placement, should he or she be placed in that grade?

Not ordinarily. Not all of the POS objectives are tested at each grade level; further, each child in the class may be working at a different level. Rather than proceeding to the new objectives at the next grade level, the teacher may decide to support or enrich objectives at the current grade level. In addition, your child's teachers must consider other information before making such important decisions as either grade placement or reading and math group placement. Such other information would include: classroom participation; application of skills; peer interaction; quality of homework; scores from teacher-made classroom tests; and the teacher's observation of your child in the classroom day by day.

The results from any one test are only one way of looking at your child's progress in school. The best picture of your child's growth and development can be gained from regular contact with your child's teacher, to find out about progress in all academic and social areas.

Do all elementary and intermediate schools administer the POS tests?

Yes.

When are they administered?

The timing and scheduling of the tests at each school are decided upon by the principal and coordinated by the school's test coordinator. POS tests may be administered at any time of the year, and at several times if a teacher or principal desires. At some schools, principals and teachers might have some or all students take POS tests within a specified period of time. At other schools they might decide that each classroom of students, or individual students, will need to take the tests periodically throughout the school year. Contact your school if you wish to know when your child will be taking a POS test.

OTHER REQUIRED TESTS

What other tests is my child required to take?

METROPOLITAN READINESS TESTS (MRT)

The Metropolitan Readiness Tests (MRT) are given to all kindergarten children at the end of the school year. As the name suggests, they are used to assist teachers and principals determine whether a child is ready for placement in grade one. The MRT measures the level of development of skills and abilities that contribute to "readiness" for first grade instruction. Scores on the MRT also give first grade teachers diagnostic information which can be used for grouping children for instruction.

DIFFERENTIAL APTITUDE TESTS (DAT)

The Differential Aptitude Tests (DAT) are administered in all Fairfax County high schools. Each high school has the option to test students in either grade 9 or 10. The DAT measures strengths in eight abilities (verbal reasoning, numerical ability, abstract reasoning, clerical speed and accuracy, mechanical reasoning, space relations, spelling and language usage). Scores in these eight areas are used by counselors when assisting students in career planning.

VIRGINIA MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTS

By mandate of the General Assembly of Virginia, in order to receive a diploma from a public high school, a student must demonstrate minimum competence in reading and mathematics on Virginia Minimum Competency Tests prescribed by the State Board of Education. Students take these tests for the first time in grade ten. If a student does not pass one or both tests as a tenth grader, he or she has additional opportunities in eleventh and twelfth grades to retake the tests (see schedule on page 5).

OTHER TESTS

Are there other tests which my child might take?

YES, if he or she is in, or being considered for, a special FCPS program.

- Students in the English as a second language (ESL) program take the California Achievement Tests (CAT) in the spring.
- Students in Title I programs such as Step Up Language Arts (SULA) and Math and Reading Skilllabs (MARS) take the Metropolitan Achievement Tests (MAT) in the fall and spring.
- Students being considered for programs for the gifted/talented take the Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Test in January.

YES, if he or she is being tested for a specific purpose at the school level.

- Students being considered for special instruction and/or programs might take the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) or the Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test (SDMT).
- Students seeking information about career choices might take any of several interest/aptitude surveys such as JOB-O or Harrington/O'Shea System for Career Decision-Making.
- Students may take optional school tests such as the Metropolitan Achievement Tests (MAT) in order to provide information for the school's use in planning instruction.

YES, if he or she is considering college or employment after high school.

- Students seeking admission to college may elect to take the "College Boards" or Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and/or one or more of several achievement tests offered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), Princeton, N.J. Each high school provides information about registration, cost, location, etc.; students are responsible for making arrangements to take the test(s).
- Students considering a career in the armed services can take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), which is offered at no cost to the student.



SCHEDULE OF REQUIRED TESTS

1981-82

Countywide administration of several tests is required each year by the Virginia Department of Education or the Fairfax County School Board. Following is the 1981-82 schedule of these tests.

Tests	Grade(s)	Test Dates	Results Available	Source of Requirement
NORM-REFERENCED TESTS				
● Metropolitan Readiness Tests (MRT) Measure skills necessary for success in beginning reading and mathematics.	K	May 3-7, 1982	June	County
● SRA Achievement/Educational Ability Series (SRA) Measure basic skills; provide information on educational development in broad content areas and an estimate of educational ability.	4, 6, 8, 11	March 15-26, 1982	June	State/ County
● Differential Aptitude Tests (DAT) Measure strengths in 8 abilities; provide information useful in planning future study.	9 or 10	September 9- October 30, 1981	Mid-December	County
CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS				
● Virginia Basic Learning Skills Tests (BLS): Reading Mathematics Measure state-adopted minimum skills; provide information on the mastery of each objective tested.	1 1 & 2	Varies by school	Shortly after testing	State
● Program of Studies (POS) Tests: Reading Mathematics Measure selected county-adopted objectives; provide information on the mastery of each objective tested.	2-7 3-8	Varies by school	Two to four weeks after testing	State/ County
● Virginia Minimum Competency Tests Measure state-adopted minimum competency skills in reading and mathematics which are required for graduation. Provide information on each skill tested.	12 ¹ 10, 11, 12 ² 12 ³	October 5-9, 1981 March 1-5, 1982 May 10-June 18, 1982	December Mid-April May/June (hand-scored)	State

¹Students in the class of 1982 who had not achieved passing scores.

²Students in the class of 1984 and those students in the classes 1982 and 1983 who have not achieved passing scores.

³Students in the class of 1982 who have not achieved passing scores.

HELP YOURSELF

BY HELPING YOUR STUDENT TO DO BETTER ON TESTS

- Try not to be overly anxious about test scores. Too much emphasis can be upsetting to children.
- Give your student encouragement. Praise your child for doing his or her best.
- Don't judge your student on the basis of a test score. Test scores are not perfect measures of what your son or daughter can do; many skills and abilities cannot be measured by paper-and-pencil tests.
- Meet with your student's teacher often to discuss his or her progress.
- Ask the teacher to suggest activities for you to do with your student at home that will help prepare for tests.
- Make sure your child attends school regularly and completes assigned homework.
- Make sure your student is well rested and alert on school days, especially on test days.
- Provide a good learning environment at home—a place to study, plus a variety of books and magazines to read.

BY ASKING QUESTIONS OF YOUR STUDENT'S TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

- What are the skills my child is expected to learn this year?
- How will you evaluate my child's progress this year? How do you use teacher-made tests and standardized tests to evaluate my child's progress? What other indicators do you use to judge progress?
- Do the mandated tests used in FCPS (e.g., POS, SRA) measure what you teach?
- What skills or attitudes are not measured by these tests?
- How often do you test my student to find out what he or she has learned?
- What do the test scores mean? Are the results consistent with my student's classroom performance? If not, what factors are contributing to this difference? Should I be concerned about a discrepancy between test scores and classroom performance?
- What can I do at home to help?
- Are the schools doing anything to give students practice in taking tests?

- Are all of the tests multiple-choice tests? What opportunities does my child have to demonstrate that he or she can create a product rather than choose the right answer?

BY ASKING QUESTIONS OF PEOPLE AT THE AREA OFFICES, AND THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

- How do FCPS test results generally compare to test scores across the country?
 - Has the test performance of FCPS students generally increased or decreased over the last decade? In what subject areas?
 - Does FCPS hold any workshops or conferences to help parents understand tests?
 - What efforts have been made to integrate the testing program with curriculum and instruction?
 - Who decides what tests are to be given?
 - How are norm-referenced tests scored?
 - What are the minimum competency test graduation requirements for students in FCPS? How many times can students take this test?
- (cont. on p. 6)